

Testimony in Support of H.B.5326: An Act Concerning
Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients

Shannon E. Sanford, RN, MSN

Public Health Committee Hearing

March 17, 2014

Good Afternoon Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and distinguished members
of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Shannon Sanford. I am a Master's Prepared Oncology Clinical Nurse
Specialist from Seymour, Connecticut. I have been a Registered Nurse since 1999. I have
experience in oncology and hospice nursing, and I taught Hospice Nursing for Naugatuck
Valley Community College. I have studied the Oregon Death With Dignity Act in detail
while earning my Master's degree at the Yale School of Nursing. I am here today to
testify in **strong support** of H.B. 5326: An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid In Dying
For Terminally Ill Patients. This bill will allow select qualifying patients to receive aid in
dying who:

- are **terminally ill competent adults**
- are in **final stage** of an **incurable** and **irreversible medical condition**
- have an attending physician that anticipates the **incurable medical condition** will produce **death within 6 months**
- **make 2 voluntary written requests 15 days apart**

Last year I, along with over 1,500 residents of the State Connecticut, came before you to
testify in support of the issue of Compassionate Aid in Dying when H.B. 6645 was heard

before the Public Health Committee. This year I brought with me over 4,000 friends, all residents of the State of Connecticut, in support of H.B. 5326 An Act Concerning Compassion Aid in Dying For Terminally Ill Patients. I would like their letters entered into the record of the hearing today.

We come before you with a stronger bill, having heard your concerns, we have included Sec 3(a) that adds 2 written requests, with a 15 day waiting period in between, based on research from the Oregon Death With Dignity Act. This waiting period allows the patient to reconsider and rescind his or her request. Helping to ensure that these decisions are being made with the utmost consideration.

To address concerns expressed in previous testimony that Aid in Dying might lead to mercy killing or active euthanasia, this bill has defined under Sec. 16 (a), that under no circumstances does this act authorize a physician or any other person to end a patient's life by lethal injection, mercy killing, assisting a suicide, or any other active euthanasia. Sections 17 and 18 reserve the right to respective civil and criminal prosecution for conduct inconsistent with the aid in dying act.

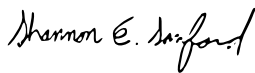
This legislation is for the people of Connecticut who need access to Aid in Dying as a medical service. As a clinician, there are times when despite our best efforts, symptoms cannot be managed to the comfort or level of functioning the patient desires. If the patient's quality of life is no longer meaningful to them, and they are **suffering** in the final stages of an incurable medical condition, with 6 months or less to live, compassionate aid in dying should be a choice.

Quality of life is different for every patient, as are treatment options. Rarely, do patients want to die. They want to live as long as they possibly can, at the highest level of functioning and quality of life, that they are able to have. I am a strong supporter of Hospice services. All patients deserve a thorough assessment and referral to hospice services. During the 15-day waiting period that this Bill requires, it would be advisable for the patient to be on Hospice services. There is no question that the patient, and their family, would benefit from the supportive interventions and may ultimately not opt for Aid in Dying.

Patients choosing compassionate aid in dying will not be the norm. These will be the patients who, despite our best efforts to manage their symptoms, are just not experiencing relief and for those patients we *need* you to support H.B.5326: An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid In Dying For Terminally Ill Patients.

Thank you for your consideration. I would welcome any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon E. Sanford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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